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ABSTRACT

This guide is the third in a series of eleven generated in 1978 as the result of workshops that focused on peer training, a different approach to teaching. The workshops provided the opportunity for members of eleven identified role groups to work together with peers to examine the relationship between their specific role group and community education and the ways in which they could stimulate their peers to improve role performance and effectiveness. This booklet focuses on community education as seen by superintendents of school districts. Topics considered include leadership by the superintendent, responsibilities, and training, as well as problems and benefits derived from community education. (Author/LD)

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SUPERINTENDENTS AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Role Guide Series #3

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Superintendents and Community Education

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PREFACE

This booklet is a result of two three-day Role Training and Peer Interaction Academies which were held in 1978 and funded by a training grant from the U.S. Office of Education, Community Education Program. The format for both Academies was designed to focus upon peer training, a method which has proven to be a useful teaching and information sharing approach. The sessions provided the opportunity for members of eleven identified role groups to work together with peers to examine in-depth:

a) the relationship between their specific role group and community education, and

b) the ways in which they could stimulate their peers to improve role performance and effectiveness.

Material development phases were interwoven with both structured and unstructured problem-solving activities. The follow-up activities and publications of the Role Guide Series were made possible from grants by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Through a sharing of information, all participants gained knowledge. The information shared in this booklet is intended for use both by experienced individuals and those just entering the field. The booklet can help the experienced individual to become more aware of additional aspects of the role and of directions being taken by others. It can assist the novice in gaining an overview of the role as seen by those who have worked in this capacity. The information also can be used as a means for guiding others in the community to gain a better understanding of the role and its relationship to community education.

As Superintendents, We Believe

We believe that schools, in cooperation with partner agencies and institutions, should serve all ages of the population by providing life-long learning experience.

We believe that financial structures can be changed to avoid adding to per pupil cost when community education programs are offered, if people who are in authority are willing to change the system.

We believe that most institutions and agencies who can affect community education are more alike then they are different, and therefore, that they can facilitate services through interagency cooperation and planning for the needs of a community.

We believe that it is possible for facilities to be shared without harm to the major purpose for which they were constructed.

We believe that minor inconveniences to teachers of regular programs will be offset by many dividends from increased positive public support and greater services to more people.

We believe that school buildings and other facilities are safer from vandalism and damage if people have positive feelings about using them and possess a feeling of ownership.

We believe that greater progress is usually made when people help people and thereby help themselves.

INTRODUCTION

The superintendent is the professional who is selected by the School Board as the educational leader for the community. In this capacity, he/she is expected to have the vision, ideas, and abilities needed to administer and advance the total educational program. The way in which the superintendent administers the educational program will vary depending on such factors as the size of the community, its socio-economic characteristics, the size of the school system, and the personality of the superintendent. However, much of what a superintendent does for any school program consists of activities also required to develop a community education program.

Because of his/her focal position, a superintendent can and does affect the community in which the school system operates. Because of his/her influence, the superintendent's understanding of the concept and his/her commitment to support community education development are important factors in determining the success of a community education program. The superintendent is perceived by most community educators to be a key person in setting the stage for cooperation among the school board, the school staff, community agencies and community members. The superintendent has the power to remove many barriers to cooperation and can take positive action in areas which enhance the development of community education. These areas may include: assisting in obtaining financial resources, assisting in obtaining qualified personnel, making recommendations to the school board, and assisting in planning and evaluation.

Many participants of the Superintendents Role Group believed that community education efforts have a logical reason to be school-based. They pointed out that public schools have facilities belonging to the tax-paying public that can and

should be used to their fullest potential. They also believed that the involvement of the community in the schools would be to the advantage of the school system in terms of increasing support for the system and aiding in securing its resource requirments. The feelings of the majority of participants were summed up in the following statement of one role group member:

> I personally see great potential in community education. I don't know of anything in recent years that I think offers more opportunities for those of us in education to render more service to more people than through community education.

LEADERSHIP

The superintendent must have a sense of the local power structure. For a community to develop and implement a comprehensive community education program, leadership must be provided in concert by the superintendent, the school board, citizens groups, and participating community agencies. The superintendent who exhibits a strong leadership style is in a position to gain the support and cooperation of the school system staff and faculty. His/her focal position also enables the superintendent to assist in community awareness efforts and to enhance the creation of interagency working relationships.

The leadership style of the superintendent will vary depending on the number and type of community groups involved and the level of program development.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The approach a superintendent will take in implementing a community education program will vary depending upon the state in which he/she serves, the size and demographic characteristics of the school system, and the other factors which contribute to the uniqueness of a given community.

The major responsibilities of a superintendent can be generalized into the areas of leadership, administration, and communication. Specific responsibilities identified by the role group participants were:

- Providing leadership for the total educational program
- Serving as chief administrative officer for the school system and as executive officer of the school board
- Recommending policies to the school board and implementing adopted policies
- Obtaining financial resources and managing the school budget
- Facilitating open communications among the school board, staff, various public groups, and news media
- Serving as liaison between school system and state department of education, as well as with local, state, and federal governmental agencies

Because of the power and influence the superintendent has in the community, the leadership and support that can be generated from his/her involvement can have a positive impact on the

school faculty and staff, as well as community agencies and community members. Activities perceived by the participants of the role group as appropriate leadership activities include:

- Holding awareness conferences
- Holding seminars and luncheons with key persons
- Using films and other media with appropriate groups
- Having key-note speakers who are authorities on community education during pre-school conferences for teachers and inviting members of governing boards, school boards, and other citizens to attend
- Meeting with parent-teacher organizations and other citizen organizations to promote involvement and support for community education
- Having school board, community members, and staff visit localities where community education programs have been implemented
- Inviting consultants from the state department of education and community education consortiums to visit and assist the superintendent and staff in meeting with groups and in planning programs
- Encouraging reading of literature related to community education by boards, community, and staff
- Encouraging the development of grant proposals

When a community has adopted the community education concept and developed the implementation process necessary to guarantee continuance, some of the superintendent's responsibilities may be altered or the direction of his/her activities may be changed. Possible activities requiring a different focus or redirection may include:

- Providing the environment to enhance the support of community education programs
- Facilitating awareness among numerous community groups (publics) and staff to set the stage for proposing policies to school board
- Developing policies for support of community education
- Presenting and recommending adoption of community education policies
- Developing procedures and regulations for the implementation of community education policies
- Developing processes and procedures for the evaluation of programs and personnel
- Providing the leadership for all operations (i.e., finances, personnel, facilities, public relations, etc.) to function efficiently
- Being as visible and actively involved as possible to show support and enthusiasm for community education
- Obtaining financial resources and planning the mechanics for administration of funds according to laws and regulations

- Communicating programs and related information to the many publics in a positive program of public relations

The potential impact of the superintendent as both leader and enthusiastic supporter of a community education program can not be overemphasized.

BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS

Realistically, in order for a superintendent to support community education, the potential benefits must out-weigh potential problems. The superintendents believed that the benefits to the school system to be derived from a successful, on-going community education program included:

- Improved public relations with the entire community
- Increased awareness of the educational needs of the total community and of alternative ways to fulfill the needs
- Increased opportunities to develop cooperative working relationships with other community agencies
- Increased opportunities to utilize community resources to enrich school programs
- Increased efficiency in utilizing school facilities and resources
- Increased positive attitudes and support for education by all segments of the community.
- Reduced vandalism and destructive behavior in the schools

- Increased school attendance

- Increased competencies in all segments of the student population

The major problems identified by the participants were in the areas of administrative control and use of school facilities. The superintendents believed that the community education program should be school-based, a view which often is not shared by other agencies who are potential partners. This question of administrative control goes beyond "turfism" and raises several barriers to the development of a comprehensive community education program. Participants indicated a belief that the solution to the question of administrative control would have to be worked out on an individual basis taking into account the strengths, resources, and priorities of the various community agencies and the educational system.

The problems arising out of increased and/or altered facility usage generally are caused by lack of support by school staff and faculty for the overall community education program and a lack of coordination and communication among users. The solutions to these problems involved strategies to increase awareness and understanding of the total concept, strategies to demonstrate the benefits to be derived from cooperation and support, and strategies to develop open channels of communication among and between users and program planners.

The third problem identified by participants is not caused by community education, however, adoption and implementation of the concept does magnify the problem. It is the problem of securing resources, especially financial resources. The strategies suggested to acquire and/or generate needed resources include:

- Demonstrating that community education efforts have a direct and positive influence on the primary educational mission of educating children and students enrolled in the K-12 program

and, therefore, justifies local public funding and support

- Charging fees for some activities and classes
- Securing donated services and volunteers
- Exploring the possibility of receiving grants awards
- Soliciting agency involvement and/or public subscription

The superintendents believed that resolution of the potential problems and conflicts is possible without hostility or undue sacrifice on the part of any of the parties involved. They indicated that a superintendent could help avoid problems and resolve those which do arise by being aware of the potential conflict areas and by using his/her position to influence and to encourage adequate planning and involvement of those affected by the community education program.

TRAINING STRATEGIES

The development and implementation of training strategies in community education for superintendents was an acknowledged need of many of the role group participants. Some of the participants did not feel that they understood the total concept well enough to provide competent leadership in community education planning and implementation. Superintendents involved in community education viewed peer training as a highly desirable approach and indicated that approaches should be explored to establish a role association discussion session with superintendents by superintendents already involved in a program. They agreed that peer training sessions or, at least, exposure sessions given to superintendents by superintendents would increase the credibility and effectiveness of such sessions.

In addition, the participants recommended the following ways to present pertinent community education information to their peers:

- Hold training sessions in locations where community education is functioning successfully with opportunities to see facilities and activities and to talk to people who are doing the job.

- Use a council made up of representatives from each involved community group -- a superintendent, principal, system-wide coordinator, school board member, parks and recreation representatives, and other agency representatives - - as a training team.

- Disseminate materials through groups already in existence, i.e., regional groups of superintendents allowing ample advanced time to plan a program

with peer participation.

- Develop transparencies and other audio-visual aids specifically designed to assist in training superintendents.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Superintendents perceived adaptability to change as one of the greatest strengths of community education. They indicated a belief that the implementation process must be flexible enough to serve the community, regardless of the model chosen. They acknowledged that each model for the delivery of community education has recognized advantages and disadvantages and that if the model is to center around the public schools, the school must be flexible enough to work with and fully support the efforts of other partner agencies involved in serving the community.

Superintendents foresaw community education expanding to provide a delivery of services for life-long learning experiences, utilizing many community resources through multiple agency cooperation. With regard to this future expansion, they viewed the role of the superintendent as the facilitator in securing educational resources for the total community rather than simply for the schools K-12 program. The group strongly agreed that future community education developmental efforts must not be a federal or state mandated program. They believed that each system must be allowed to develop a natural cycle for implementation in which the desire and necessary leadership can be fostered to move towards a more comprehensive community education role and function for local public school systems.

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